

SECRET

**Lessons of the Events Surrounding
the Villainous Assassination of
Com. KIROV**



*To All Party Organizations
January 18, 1935*

CONFIDENTIAL LETTER FROM THE CC OF THE VKP(b)

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Comrade KIROV***

To all Party organizations.

Now that the hotbed of this villainy—the Zinovievite anti-Soviet group—has been utterly crushed, and the perpetrators have received their due punishment, the Central Committee deems it time to take stock of the events surrounding the assassination of Comrade **Kirov**, to provide a political assessment of them, and to draw the lessons that emerge from an analysis of these events.

The purpose of this letter of the CC of the VKP(b) is to assist Party cadres in carrying out this specific final task.

I. FACTS.

First of all, it is necessary to note the following indisputable facts established by the investigation and the court:

1) The villainous assassination was committed by a Leningrad group of Zinovievites that called itself the “Leningrad Center.”

2) The ideological and political leader of the “Leningrad Center” was the Zinovievite “Moscow Center,” which, while apparently unaware of the specific plot to assassinate Comrade Kirov, was certainly aware of the terrorist sentiments of the “Leningrad Center” and actively stoked them.

3) Although differing from one another just as the instigators of a crime differ from its actual perpetrators, these two “Centers” constituted a single whole. They were united by a shared Trotskyist-Zinovievite platform—albeit threadbare and shattered by reality—and by a common, unprincipled, and purely careerist goal: to seize leadership positions within the Party and government and to secure high-ranking posts at any cost.

4) Having lost the confidence of the working class due to their reactionary platform and deprived themselves of any hope of support from the party rank-and-file, the Zinovievites, in pursuit of their criminal aims, slid into the quagmire of counter-revolutionary adventurism, into the quagmire of anti-Soviet individual terror, and, finally, into the quagmire of establishing ties with the Latvian consul in Leningrad, an agent of the German-Fascist interventionists.

5) In order to conceal their criminal activities from the Party while retaining their Party membership cards, which granted access to all institutions and Party leaders, the Zinovievites adopted a policy of duplicity as their primary method of dealing with the Party, masking their villainous deeds with oaths and declarations of loyalty to the Party and devotion to Soviet power—in other words, they embarked on the same path typically taken by White Guard saboteurs, spies, and provocateurs seeking to infiltrate our ranks, worm their way into our confidence, and wreak havoc.

6) The duplicity [*dvurushnichestvo*] of the Zinovievites, shielded by their Party cards, facilitated their preparations for and execution of the villainous assassination of Comrade Kirov.

7) The lack of sufficient vigilance on the part of the Leningrad organization—and, in particular, the inattention and outright negligence regarding basic security requirements shown by the NKVD bodies in Leningrad, which had received reports from various sources a month prior to the assassination regarding a plot against Comrade Kirov yet failed to implement any serious security measures—hindered the Party and the government from preventing this dastardly assassination.

Such are the indisputable facts established by the investigation and the court.

II. POLITICAL ASSESSMENT.

How could it happen that the Party failed to notice the existence of an extensive counter-revolutionary group of Zinovievites, and that the Leningrad Party organization and, in particular, the NKVD bodies in Leningrad, not only overlooked the counter-revolutionary terrorist “work” of the “Leningrad Center” but also failed to take necessary security measures, even after receiving warnings from various individuals about a planned assassination attempt on Comrade Kirov?

It must be borne in mind that the Zinovievist counter-revolutionary group, in the form revealed by the investigation and trial, represents something entirely new, something unprecedented in the history of our Party. In the history of our party there have been many factional groupings. These groups usually sought to pit their views against the Party line and to defend them openly before the Party. Yet the history of our Party knows of no other group that made it its aim to conceal its views and hide its true political face—a group that hypocritically swore loyalty to the Party line while simultaneously plotting terrorist attacks against Party representatives. The Zinoviev group proved to be the only one in the history of our Party to make duplicity its guiding principle and to sink into the mire of counter-revolutionary terrorism, all while masking its nefarious deeds with repeated declarations in the press and at the Party congress regarding its devotion to the Party. It was difficult for the Party and its leadership to imagine that veteran Party members such as Zinoviev, Kamenev, Evdokimov, and Bakaev could stoop so low and ultimately cast their lot with the White Guard rabble.

As for the Leningrad Party organization, and especially the agencies of the NKVD in Leningrad, certain links within them proved to be infected with a complacency dangerous to the cause and a negligence regarding security matters—intolerable for a Bolshevik—stemming from the erroneous assumption that as our successes grow and, consequently, as our enemies' failures mount, the latter supposedly become increasingly tame and harmless; and that, therefore, there are no grounds to fear that the enemies of our Party, living out their final days, might resort to terror as a “last resort.”

The Party long ago proclaimed that the stronger the USSR becomes and the more hopeless the enemies' position, the sooner those enemies, precisely because of their hopeless situation, might slide into the

quagmire of terror, and that it is therefore essential to redouble the vigilance of our people in every possible way. Yet, for some of our comrades in Leningrad, this truth evidently remained a closely guarded secret.

How else can one explain the fact that, despite warnings from a number of comrades regarding the assassination attempt being plotted against Comrade Kirov, the agencies of the NKVD in Leningrad deemed it unnecessary to take the requisite security measures?

How else can one explain the fact that the murderer of Comrade Kirov—the degenerate L. Nikolaev—was not even searched after being detained near Comrade Kirov’s car three weeks prior to the assassination, having lunged toward Kirov as he approached his vehicle, simply because he presented a Party membership card to the Chekists? Is it difficult for a Chekist to understand that a Party card can be forged or stolen from its owner, and that the card itself—without verification of its authenticity, and especially without verification of the person presenting it—cannot serve as a sufficient guarantee when dealing with a suspicious individual behaving in a highly suspicious manner as Comrade Kirov approached the car awaiting him? What had become of vigilance?..¹

It might seem strange and unnatural that the role of carrying out acts of terror, as a last resort in the struggle of dying bourgeois classes against Soviet power, was assumed by degenerates within our own Party, members of the Zinovievist group. Yet, upon closer examination, it is easy to see that there is nothing strange or unnatural about this. In a Party as large as ours, it is not difficult for dozens or hundreds of degenerates, who have broken with Lenin’s Party and effectively become collaborators with the White Guards, to conceal themselves.

Wasn’t Malinovsky, who came from the working class and was a member of the Bolshevik faction in the Duma in 1913, an agent provocateur? And what is a “Bolshevik” agent provocateur if not a degenerate within our Party, a traitor to our Bolshevik Party? Yet Malinovsky was not the only agent provocateur in our Party.

Didn’t Zinoviev and Kamenev, formerly most close disciples and associates of Lenin, behave like degenerates and traitors to our Party when in October 1917, both before and after the uprising, they openly and directly in the face of the bourgeoisie opposed their teacher Lenin and his Party? How else can this treacherous conduct be described but as the behavior of degenerates and enemies of our Party?

¹ Two periods here in the published version from 1989, possible ellipses. —*T.D.*

Yet Zinoviev and Kamenev were not the only members of our Party to earn the title of degenerates and enemies of our Party.

It has been established that Anatoly Rumiantsev—the brother of the notorious Vladimir Rumiantsev, who was executed in Leningrad and was a pillar of the Leningrad Zinovievites—defected to General Yudenich’s side during the latter’s 1919 offensive against Leningrad. He executed captured Communists, commanded White Guard units fighting the Red Army near the city, and generally caused as much mischief as he could. Moreover, when he returned to Leningrad in 1920 following Yudenich’s defeat and sought admission to the Party, his brother Vladimir—a Party member and part of the Zinoviev group—not only failed to expose him as a White Guardist and enemy of the working class but, on the contrary, used his own standing to help him worm his way into the Party. One must ask: is there really much difference between the inveterate White Guardist Anatoly Rumiantsev and his brother Vladimir—a Party member and a leader of the Leningrad Zinoviev group that orchestrated the dastardly murder of Comrade Kirov? Is it not clear that Vladimir Rumiantsev, who shielded his White Guardist brother and smuggled him into the Party through deception, had himself long since become a White Guardist and an enemy of our Party, well before the murder of Comrade Kirov?

It has been established that the brother of Leonid Nikolaev, Comrade Kirov’s assassin, a member of the Zinoviev group in Leningrad—was Pëtr Nikolaev, a quintessential White Guardist. He had deserted the Red Army twice, lived illegally in Leningrad, consorted there with avowed White Guardists, went about armed with a revolver, and sought an opportunity to kill at least one high-ranking Party official so that he could subsequently cross the border and take refuge from the punitive hand of Soviet power. Yet Leonid Nikolaev, himself a Party member and a member of the Zinoviev group, not only failed to expose him to the Soviet authorities but, on the contrary, harbored him in his apartment, supplied him with a revolver, and promised to obtain a passport for him should he flee abroad. Is it not clear that there was no longer any difference between the avowed White Guardist Pëtr Nikolaev and his brother Leonid Nikolaev—a member of the Zinoviev group in Leningrad and, subsequently, the assassin of Comrade Kirov—and that Leonid Nikolaev, long before the assassination of Comrade Kirov, was already an enemy of the Party and a White Guardist through and through?

What, then, is surprising or unnatural about the fact that it was precisely V. Rumiantsev and L. Nikolaev—those degenerates within our

Party, who possessed extensive experience in deceiving the Party and shielding their White Guardist relatives from the punitive hand of Soviet power—who ended up acting as the executors of the counter-revolutionary aspirations of the White Guardist rabble?

It cannot be considered a coincidence that degenerates like V. Rumiantsev and L. Nikolaev—along with their friends, who were likewise degenerates such as Kotolynov and Shatsky—made their nest precisely within the Zinoviev group. Only the Zinoviev group, with its hatred of the Party leadership, its treachery and duplicity within the Party, its political unscrupulousness, and its readiness to resort to any means of struggle and any sort of unscrupulous schemes—only such a petty-bourgeois, counter-revolutionary group could regard degenerates like Rumiantsev, Nikolaev, Kotolynov, and Shatsky as “its own.” Only such a vile group could concoct a “suitable” ideology for these degenerates, one capable of serving as a “justification” for their White Guard-style deeds.

What, in fact, is the Zinoviev anti-Party group, now that its true nature has been fully revealed by the materials of the investigation and the trial?

Leninism demands that Party members be true sons of their Party, devoted to it to the very end. Yet, in their practice, the Zinovievites replaced all this with treason against the Party and betrayal of its interests, while fraudulently using verbal protestations of loyalty and devotion to the Party as a mask.

Leninism demands that Party members be principled in politics and truthful in their dealings with the Party. Yet, the Zinovievites turned their protestations of adherence to principle and truthfulness toward the Party into a mask concealing their political unscrupulousness, duplicity, hypocrisy, and deception of the Party.

Leninism holds that a minority must not attempt to impose its will upon the Party majority, and that the minority must unconditionally submit to the majority, for therein lies the foundation of democratic centralism. The Zinovievites, on the other hand, proceed from the premise that the minority has the right to impose its will upon the party majority—even through violence, even through terror. And they call this inner-party democracy!

Leninism opposes individual terror. The Zinovievites, however, believe that while individual terror may be unsuitable against the bourgeoisie, it is perfectly permissible against responsible party officials.

Here are some of the most striking features of the Zinoviev anti-Soviet group.

Is it not clear that only such a vile group could harbor, "nurture," and corrupt degenerates of the ilk of Nikolaev, Rumiantsev, Kotolynov, and Shatsky?

Is it not clear that only the "protégés" of this vile group—who, moreover, held membership cards granting them access to all Party institutions—could serve as the most convenient instrument for carrying out the terrorist ambitions of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and its fascist-White Guard agents?

III. CONCLUSIONS.

The following main conclusions emerge from the foregoing:

1) The Zinoviev anti-Party group is the only group in the history of our Party that turned duplicity into a system in its practice. The history of our Party has known quite a few factional groupings. Their distinguishing feature was that they did not conceal their disagreements with the Party, did not hide their views, and openly defended them before the Party. Only in the last 7–8 years, when the Party's political victory and the correctness of its line had become all too obvious, and the hopelessness of the position of all manner of anti-Party groups all too undeniable, did the remnants of old factional groups begin to conceal their views and partially shift to the path of duplicity. The Zinoviev group is the only group that not only conceals its disagreements with the Party but has openly and systematically maligned its own platform and sworn loyalty to the Party, solely to gain its confidence and deceive it. The fact that the vile assassin Nikolaev turned out to be a Judas-like traitor with a Party card in his pocket, and that the individuals who incited him to commit this monstrous crime not only hid behind their status as Party members but openly swore loyalty to the Party and its Central Committee, demonstrates beyond doubt that duplicity was the sole article of faith recognized and practiced to the bitter end by the Zinoviev group.

The Zinoviev factional group was the most treacherous and despicable of all factional groups in the history of our Party.

2) The Zinoviev factional group is the only group in the history of our Party that deemed it possible to resort to terror as a method of

struggle against the Party and its leadership. The history of our Party has seen many factional groupings. In the struggle of these groupings against the Party line—just as in the Party's struggle against them—one method was customarily employed: the clarification and formulation of differences, closed discussion within leading Party bodies, open discussion in the press and at Party meetings, voting and the counting of votes, the submission of the minority to the majority, and finally, either the departure from the Party of those who did not consider it possible to submit to the Party majority, or the expulsion from the Party of the most incorrigible factionalists who violated Party discipline and unity. The history of our Party knows of not a single instance where factional groupings attempted to use terror against the Party, or where the Party attempted to use terror against factional groupings. The history of our Party knows of not a single instance where a grouping that found itself in the minority attempted to impose its will on the Party majority through violence or terror, or attempted to employ terror against representatives of the Party majority. The Zinoviev factional group is the only group in the history of our Party that, having become utterly bankrupt and having lost all support among the Party masses, slid down to this despicable, White Guard path.

The Zinoviev factional group was, in essence, a disguised form of a White Guard organization, fully deserving of having its members treated as White Guards.

3) Under the present conditions of the complete and decisive victory of the Party line, when open struggle against Party policy has become patently hopeless, double-dealing is the very evil that alone can sustain and shield the existence of anti-Party elements within the Party. The task is to root out and eradicate this evil completely. A double-dealer [*dvyrushnik*] is not merely a deceiver of the Party; he is, at the same time, a scout for forces hostile to us, a saboteur and provocateur who has infiltrated the Party through deceit and seeks to undermine the foundations of our Party, and consequently the foundations of our state; for to undermine the strength of our Party—the ruling party—is to undermine the strength of our state. Therefore, in dealing with a double-dealer, one cannot stop at expulsion from the Party; he must also be arrested and isolated to prevent him from undermining the strength of the state of the proletarian dictatorship.

4) We must put an end to the opportunistic complacency stemming from the erroneous assumption that, as our strength grows, the enemy

supposedly becomes increasingly tame and harmless. Such an assumption is fundamentally wrong. It is a hangover from Right deviationism, which assured everyone that enemies would gradually ease their way into socialism and in the end become genuine socialists. It is not for Bolsheviks to rest on their laurels or let their guard down. What we need is not complacency, but vigilance—genuine Bolshevik revolutionary vigilance. We must remember that the more hopeless the enemies' position becomes, the more readily they will resort to an "extreme measure" as the only recourse left to those who are doomed in their struggle against Soviet power. We must bear this in mind and remain vigilant. The events surrounding the assassination of Comrade Kirov demonstrate that a failure to grasp this truth played a cruel trick on the officials of the NKVD in Leningrad. Let this serve as a lesson to us. This does not mean, of course, that we should indiscriminately disparage the Leningrad officials of the NKVD. But it undoubtedly means that we must systematically assist them—with both personnel and advice—awaken and sharpen their vigilance, and raise and strengthen their combat readiness. For it must be borne in mind that Leningrad is a unique city, where the largest number of former tsarist officials and their retainers, former gendarmes and police officers, have remained; that these gentry, spreading out in all directions, corrupt and undermine our administrative apparatus; and that the proximity of the borders, facilitating the possibility of escaping prosecution, creates a sense of impunity among criminal elements. Precisely for this reason, Bolshevik vigilance is the guiding star that must light the way, first and foremost, for Leningrad's Party workers.

5) The teaching of Party history among Party members must be raised to the proper level, as must the study of all manner of anti-Party groupings in our Party's history, their methods of struggling against the Party line and their tactics, and—even more importantly—the study of the tactics and methods our Party used to combat these anti-Party groupings, the tactics and methods that enabled our Party to overcome and utterly defeat them. Party members must be familiar not only with how the Party fought and overcame the Cadets, SRs, Mensheviks, and Anarchists, but also with how it fought and overcame the Trotskyists, "Democratic Centralists," the "Workers' Opposition," the Zinovievites, Right-wing deviationists, Right-Leftist freaks, and so forth. We must not forget that knowledge and understanding of our Party's history constitute

a vital means of ensuring the full revolutionary vigilance of Party members.

January 18, 1935

Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)

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